UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
LIMITED

E/CN.17/1996/L.17
1 May 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
Fourth session
18 April-3 May 1996
Agenda item 7

PROGRESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

Draft decision submitted by the Chairman

Review of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States

I. OVERALL CONSIDERATIONS

1. The Commission recalls that the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, held in 1994, adopted the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States to promote concrete action at the national, regional and international levels in 15 priority areas, with provisions for an initial review in 1996. The Commission notes that its recommendations are complementary to those contained in the Programme of Action. In the context of the special session of the General Assembly, to be convened in 1997 to review the overall implementation of Agenda 21, specific modalities will be recommended by the Commission for the full review of the Programme of Action in 1999.

2. The Commission, having examined the report of the Secretary-General on the sustainable development of coastal areas, tourism, energy resources, air transport, maritime transport, telecommunications, and management of environmental and natural disasters in small island developing States (E/CN.17/1996/20 and Add.1-7), the report of the Secretary-General on current donor activities in support of sustainable development in small island developing States (E/CN.17/1996/21) and the report of the High-level Panel Meeting on Island Developing Countries (E/CN.17/1996/IDC/3-UNCTAD/LLDC/IDC/3),

and having the benefit of the views expressed, notes the action taken by small island developing States at the national and regional levels to implement the Programme of Action.

3. The Commission notes the support of the international community, and the plans and programmes of organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system to assist in the implementation of the Programme of Action and in the coordination and monitoring of its implementation. The Commission welcomes the support given by other relevant intergovernmental organizations.

4. The Commission recognizes the importance of SIDSTAP and SIDSNET in the overall implementation of the Programme of Action, and encourages the United Nations Development Programme to continue, in cooperation with Governments, its action to operationalize the two mechanisms.

5. The Commission stresses the importance of coordination in the area of strategy and policy formulation and recognizes the importance of consultation and interaction at the national, regional and international levels. In this context, the Commission emphasizes the role played by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme and the Caribbean Community.

6. The Commission expresses concern at the overall trend of declining levels of flows of official development assistance to small island developing States (SIDS), but notes the need for better information on flows. The Commission emphasizes that it is imperative that domestic efforts of SIDS to mobilize financial resources for the effective implementation of the Programme of Action are adequately supported by the international community, as envisaged in the provisions of the Programme of Action, in particular those contained in paragraph 66 thereof. Recognizing that small island developing States are among the most environmentally vulnerable, the Commission urges the international community to give special priority to their situations and needs, including through access to grants and other concessional resources.

7. The Commission notes that a vulnerability index that takes into account the constraints arising from small size and environmental fragility, as well as the incidence of natural disasters of a national scale, and the consequent relationship of these constraints to economic vulnerability, should bring greater clarity to the development challenges and needs of SIDS. The Commission notes the slow progress on the index to date and encourages the relevant bodies of the United Nations system to accord priority to the development of the index, in keeping with the provisions of the Programme of Action and General Assembly resolution 50/116. The Commission notes with appreciation the offer by the Government of Malta to host the centre for the computation of the index on an ongoing basis.

8. The Commission notes that current trends of trade liberalization and globalization are bringing new challenges as well as possible opportunities to SIDS. It recommends that to meet the new challenges and take advantage of the new opportunities SIDS need to undertake necessary institutional reforms; develop responsive economic policy frameworks and human resources in order to

enhance their competitiveness and their ability to diversify quickly into new activities; explore cooperative approaches for sharing information and experience and building human and institutional capacity. The Commission urges the international community to recognize the inherent weaknesses of SIDS and recommends that it provide adequate support to SIDS to meet their adjustment costs and their information, human development and technology needs to enable them to sustain the development of their exports, while maintaining the integrity of their natural resource base.

9. Recognizing the coordinating role of the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development in implementing the Programme of Action, the Commission recommends that the Secretary-General:

(a) Take into account the need to continue to provide substantive secretariat support to intergovernmental and inter-agency processes related to the monitoring, review and coordination of the implementation of the Programme of Action;

(b) Ensure that the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development continues to act as a liaison and focal point for agencies of the United Nations system, as well as other relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, on matters related to the follow-up and implementation of the Programme of Action.

(c) Request the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, in its coordinating role, to look into the appropriate modalities for mobilizing resources for effective implementation of the Programme of Action.

10. The Commission stresses the important role the private sector can play in investment for sustainable development in SIDS, particularly in the infrastructure and tourism sectors. This should be based on a sustainable development strategy that integrates economic, social and environmental policies and regulatory frameworks to promote appropriate private investment.

II. CLIMATE CHANGE AND SEALEVEL RISE

11. The Commission recalls that SIDS are particularly vulnerable to global climate change and sealevel rise. Potential effects of global climate change and sealevel rise are increased strength and frequency of tropical storms and inundation of some islands with loss of exclusive economic zones, economic infrastructure, human settlements and culture.

12. The Commission welcomes the growing number of ratifications of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the decision that commitments contained in article 4, paragraph 2 (a) and (b), were inadequate to meet the ultimate objective of the Convention.

13. [The Commission takes note of the conclusion contained in the second assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, inter alia, that there is a discernible human influence on the climate system, and

encourages the Ad Hoc Group on the Berlin Mandate to accelerate its work in drafting a protocol or another legal instrument containing quantified reduction limitation objectives for the period beyond 2000, so that it would fulfil its mandate in the required time.]*

14. The Commission also calls upon the international community to support SIDS in their efforts to adapt to the sealevel rise that will be experienced as a result of the impact of greenhouse gases that have already been emitted into the atmosphere.

III. NATURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTERS

15. The Commission noted that this issue was being considered following a two-year period in which SIDS experienced several major natural disasters that brought catastrophes of national proportions to these countries because of their small size and fragile ecosystems.

16. The Commission recognizes that the most effective strategy for responding to natural disasters is formulated through regional cooperation as an integral part of sustainable development frameworks, with international support. In support of this objective the Commission:

(a) Encourages the Governments of the small island developing States to further increase their efforts towards subregional, regional and interregional cooperation;

(b) Supports the implementation of the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action with particular regard to improved education and training in disaster reduction, including the creation of interdisciplinary scientific and technical networking at all levels, for the purpose of capacity-building and human resource development in SIDS;

(c) Calls upon all Governments to support the facilitation of an effective synergy between the implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action;

(d) Invites Governments to consider establishing an informal open-ended working group within the existing International Framework of Action for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, with the membership of concerned States, as well as of all relevant sectors in disaster reduction, with a view to ensuring full integration and participation of SIDS in the mapping of a concerted strategy for disaster reduction into the twenty-first century.

---

* It was decided to retain paragraph 13 pending final decisions on protection of the atmosphere, on the understanding that if its contents replicated those of any decision on the protection of the atmosphere, it would be dropped, otherwise it will be retained.

17. The Commission also calls on the international community to support the efforts of SIDS directed towards:

(a) Mobilizing additional resources to address urgent disaster reduction requirements in SIDS;

(b) Improving access to disaster and warning information in order to enhance the capability of SIDS with respect to disaster management;

(c) Providing technical, financial and expert support for the establishment of a mechanism for interregional cooperation and the exchange of information among small island States on disaster reduction, in particular with respect to training, institutional development and disaster mitigation programming;

(d) Targeting research and further development of knowledge in the following thematic areas for building risk-reduction capacities in small island States:

(i) Insurance as a preventive and mitigating tool for disaster reduction;

(ii) Telecommunications and information systems as a tool for disaster reduction;

(iii) Limits and opportunities for the establishment of national disaster emergency funds and emergency administrative procedures;

(iv) Evaluation of constraints in the access of small island States to reliable data, disaster-specific knowledge, and technology means;

(v) A review of the linkages between disasters, development and environment, including the development of methods for the systematic appraisal of developments in relation to disaster risks;

(vi) An analysis of the linkage between global climate change and the characteristics and occurrence of natural hazards in small island States.

IV. COASTAL AND MARINE RESOURCES

18. The Commission stresses the fact that for SIDS, effective coastal zone management is a prerequisite for sustainable development. In addition, the marine areas play an important role in meeting some essential needs. The importance of these areas in the sustainable development of SIDS were recognized in the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea itself and in the 1995 Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks (A/50/550, annex I), as well as in the Coral Reef Initiative (convened in the Philippines in June 1995) and the 1995 Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities.

19. The Commission also recognizes the importance of the decision 2/10 of the Second Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in the context of the protection and conservation of coastal and marine resources of SIDS.

20. The Commission recommends that in developing integrated national coastal area management strategies and plans, Governments should ensure that all steps are undertaken with the active participation of the private sector and local communities. Mechanisms for institutional coordination should also be established.

21. Within the context of integrated coastal area management (ICAM) for SIDS, the activities, planned or under way, by international organizations should be implemented in a coordinated and cost-effective manner. These activities should include, as one of the priorities, the protection and management of marine and coastal areas through ICAM, including a number of demonstration or pilot projects in integrated "island" management, in which marine and coastal resource issues are incorporated into the development planning process of selected SIDS.

22. To assist national authorities in their tasks of designing and implementing ICAM plans, guidelines for specific subsectors such as tourism, fisheries, agriculture and forestry, which are among the main users of resources in the coastal areas of SIDS, should be further developed. The experience gained by the United Nations Environment Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in these areas should be used in the process. Such guidelines can be of assistance to planners and users in these subsectors.

V. ENERGY RESOURCES

23. The Commission notes that SIDS continue to be heavily dependent on conventional sources of energy, although as a group the total consumed was a small percentage of world consumption. The Commission also notes that due to the small quantities involved the cost per capita was relatively high and use was generally inefficient.

24. The Commission calls upon the international community, including the Global Environment Facility, within the framework of its operational strategy, to support commercial energy development in SIDS based on those environmentally sound renewable sources with demonstrated viability, to support improvement of the efficiency of existing technologies and end-use equipment based on conventional energy sources, and to assist with the financing of investments necessary to expand energy supplies beyond urban areas.

25. The Commission notes that many SIDS continue to depend on biomass fuels. It encourages the implementation of projects that will ensure a sustainable fuelwood industry.

VI. TOURISM RESOURCES

26. The Commission recognizes the continued importance of tourism as one of only a few development options for many SIDS, both as a dynamic sector and as one that can stimulate growth in others.

27. The Commission encourages SIDS to pursue policies of sustainable tourism development by:

(a) Diversifying the tourism product, enhancing its quality and increasingly targeting the upper segment of the tourist market;

(b) Strengthening linkages of other economic sectors with tourism so that domestic production can viably provide for the consumer needs of tourists to the maximum extent possible;

(c) Investing adequately in the collection of data on all relevant indicators of benefits and costs necessary for cost-benefit analysis in order to be able to carry out systematic evaluations of the contribution of the tourism sector to the domestic economy in relation to other sectors and in relation to social and environmental costs;

(d) Developing a multidisciplinary approach for the rigorous vetting of tourism development proposals, taking into account prospective cumulative impacts of tourism development, and establishing environmental standards for the approval of projects.

28. The Commission calls upon the international community to provide appropriate assistance for the improvement and development of basic physical infrastructures in SIDS, such as airports and harbours, roads, telecommunications systems and freshwater systems.

29. The Commission notes the importance of regional cooperation in tourism and proposes that consideration be given to the development of common policy guidelines and standards at the regional level for the mutual benefit of SIDS. The Commission calls upon the international community to support the efforts of regional tourism organizations to improve their effectiveness.

VII. TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS

30. Bearing in mind the resource constraint for expansion and modernization of the telecommunications network in SIDS, the high per capita cost of infrastructure due to small market size and the lack of economies of scale, the Commission encourages SIDS to continue their telecommunications development and to improve facilities and availability. The Commission also encourages SIDS to maintain and strengthen communications and business links, on a regional and subregional basis, with larger neighbours in the continental shelf, as well as with development partners.

31. The Commission calls upon the international community to assist SIDS in identifying the most feasible ways and means of securing financial assistance

from different sources, and invites the World Bank and the regional development banks, where appropriate, to systematically finance telecommunications development, particularly where most urgently needed.

32. The Commission takes note of developments in air transport since the 1994 Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and proposes a study of the impact on SIDS of changes taking place in the regulation of air transport. The Commission also proposes that more regional cooperation with regard to the regulatory aspects of air transport, such as joint negotiation of air transport agreements, should be pursued.

33. The Commission calls upon the international community, where appropriate, to facilitate and support new and existing initiatives taken at the regional level to improve air transport for the benefit of SIDS.

34. The Commission notes that with respect to the economies of SIDS which are open, maritime transport continues to represent an important lifeline to other markets. The Commission is convinced that improved maritime transport, which responds to the peculiar circumstances of SIDS and includes reduced overall costs, would be supportive of sustainable development goals.

35. The Commission encourages the modernization of fleets through appropriate investment incentives and innovative measures. It invites SIDS to consider becoming parties to relevant international legal instruments to promote maritime safety and environmental protection, and standardization in shipping. Regional initiatives are also encouraged to support these goals, expand maritime capabilities of regions, and provide an improved intra-regional sea transportation service with the support of the international community.

36. In view of the large investments involved in the development of infrastructure and acquisition of the means of maritime transport, the Commission calls upon the international community, where appropriate, to support the efforts of SIDS at the national and regional levels.